

ABSTRACT

Title: Body image perception amongst women aged 25-35 years in a rural area of Tamil Nadu, its association with the current nutritional status, body image perception discrepancies, weight reducing behaviours and eating disorders

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Objectives: The objectives were to assess body image perceptions of rural women aged 25-35 years, agreement with body mass index (BMI), factors associated with incorrect body image perceptions, following healthy life styles choices and eating disorders.

Methods: A cross sectional study with two stage cluster sampling was carried out among women aged 25 to 35 years in Kaniyambadi block, Vellore district. Nine participants each were randomly selected from 30 randomly selected villages. Body image perceptions were assessed by Stunkard Figure Rating Scale and self-categorization as thin, normal and fat. EAT 26 questionnaire was used to screen for eating disorders. Anthropometric measurements were taken to calculate BMI. Weighted Kappa was calculated for agreement between self-perception and BMI. Multiple logistics regression was done to study the association between factors influencing incorrect perception and following healthy life style.

Results: 34.8% participants considered overweight figures as ideal. There was substantial agreement between actual BMI and self-perceptions of body size using Stunkard scale (weighted Kappa- 0.0621) and self-categorization (weighted Kappa- 0.649). 35.1% participants had ever received advice regarding life style modification. Incorrect perception was significantly associated with urban schooling and never being diagnosed overweight. Diagnosis of overweight, perception of being fat, considering others' opinion and higher socioeconomic status were significantly associated with healthier diet and physical activity. 17(6.2%) women were screened positive for eating disorder. This was significantly associated with higher SES, self-perception of being fat, body image dissatisfaction and negative societal opinion.

Conclusion: Stunkard scale as well as self-categorization of body size can be used to assess the perceptions and as a tool for education on ideal body size and lifestyle choices. Diagnosis of overweight and perception of being fat are associated with healthy lifestyle choices.

Keywords : Young women, body image perception, obesity, overweight, Stunkard scale, lifestyle, eating disorder